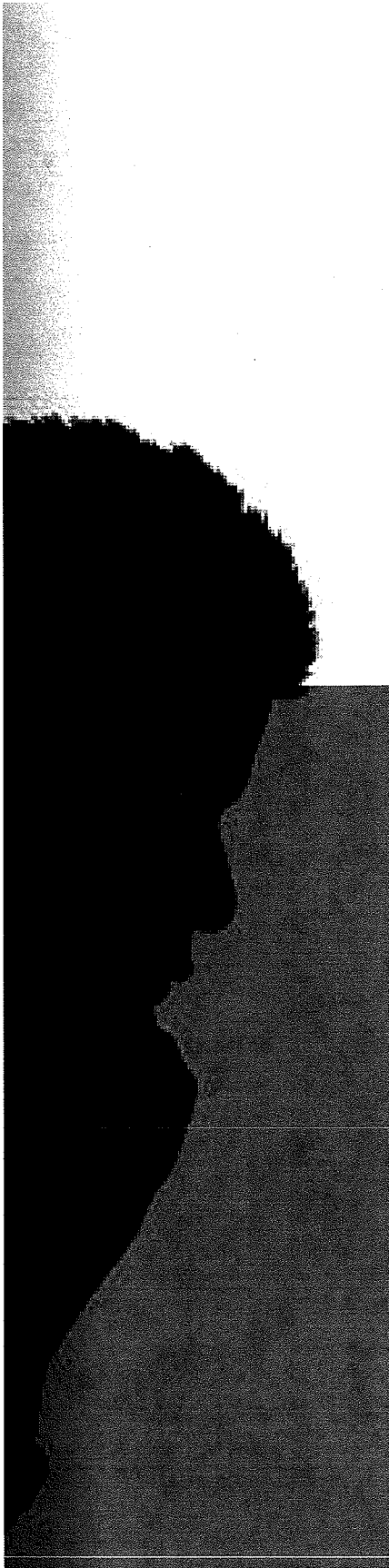


TROMBONES AND COLLEGES

by Walter Dean Myers

Uh-oh, report-card day!
Read to see how friends
and family help Clyde
deal with his news.



Connect to Your Life

Every now and then a bad day comes along. The last time you felt disappointed or confused, to whom did you turn? What did that person say or do to lift your spirits?

Key to the Story

This excerpt was taken from the novel *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff*. The novel is about a group of friends who live in Harlem, a section of New York City. "Stuff," whose real name is Francis, is the narrator. Through Stuff you'll find out about Clyde, Gloria, and Kitty. You'll also meet Mrs. Jones, Clyde and Kitty's mother.

Vocabulary Preview

Words to Know

system	disgusted
document	annoyed
required	



Reading Coach CD-ROM selection

FOCUS

See what situation Clyde faces because of his poor grades.

It was a dark day when we got our report cards. The sky was full of gray clouds and it was sprinkling rain. I was over to Clyde's house and Gloria and Kitty were there. Sam probably would have been there too, only he had got a two-week job in the afternoons helping out at Freddie's. Actually he only did it so that his mother would let him be on the track team again.

Sam and his mother had this little system going. He would do something good-doing
10 and she'd let him do something that he wanted to.

system

(sŷs' tēm)
n. set way of doing things

Clyde's report card was on the kitchen table and we all sat around it like it was some kind of a big important document. I had got a pretty good report card and had wanted to show it off but I knew it wasn't the time. Clyde pushed the card toward me and I read it. He had all satisfactory remarks on the side labeled Personal Traits and Behavior. He had also
20 received B's in music and art appreciation. But everything else was either a C or a D except mathematics. His mathematics mark was a big red F that had been circled. I don't know why they had to circle the F when it was the only red mark on the card. In the Teacher's Comments section someone had written that Clyde had "little ability to handle an academic program."

document

(dŏk' yə mēt)
n. official report

"A little ability is better than none," I said. No one said anything so I figured it
30 probably wasn't the right time to try to cheer Clyde up.

academic

program
classes in subjects that lead to college

I knew all about his switching from a commercial program to an academic program, but I really hadn't thought he'd have any trouble.

commercial program
classes in subjects that lead directly to a job

"I saw the grade adviser today. He said I should switch back to the commercial program." Clyde looked like he'd start crying any minute. His eyes were red and his voice was shaky.

- 40 "He said that I had to take mathematics over and if I failed again or failed another required subject I couldn't graduate. The way it is now I'm going to have to finish up in the summer because I switched over."

required
(rĭ kwĭrd')
adj. needed

THINK IT THROUGH

What does Clyde have to do in order to stay in an academic program?

FOCUS

Clyde's mother comes home. Read to find out what Clyde decides.

"I think you can pass it if you really want to," Kitty said. Clyde's sister was so pretty I couldn't even look at her. If I did I started feeling funny and couldn't talk right. Sometimes I daydreamed about marrying her.

- 50 Just then Clyde's mother came in and he gave a quick look at Kitty.

"Hi, young ladies and young gentlemen." Mrs. Jones was a kind of heavy woman but she was pretty, too. You could tell she was Kitty's mother if you looked close. She put her package down and started

taking things out. "I heard you people talking when I first came in. By the way you hushed up I guess you don't want me to hear what you were talking about. I'll be out of your way in a minute, soon as I put the frozen foods in the refrigerator."

"I got my report card today," Clyde said. His mother stopped taking the food out and turned toward us. Clyde pushed the report card about two inches toward her. She really didn't even have to look at the card to know that it was bad. She could have told that just by looking at Clyde. But she picked it up and looked at it a long time. First she looked at one side and then the other and then back at the first side again.

REREAD

What do you think Clyde's mother will say?

"What they say around the school?" she asked, still looking at the card.

"They said I should drop the academic course and go back to the other one." I could hardly hear Clyde, he spoke so low.

"Well, what you going to do, young man?" She looked up at Clyde and Clyde looked up at her and there were tears in his eyes and I almost started crying. I can't stand to see my friends cry. "What are you going to do, Mr. Jones?"

"I'm—I'm going to keep the academic course," Clyde said.

"You think it's going to be any easier this time?" Mrs. Jones asked.

"No."

THINK IT THROUGH

Which program does Clyde choose? Is this the choice you expected him to make? Give reasons for your answer.

FOCUS

Clyde's problem triggers a memory. Read to find out the memory Mrs. Jones shares.

"Things ain't always easy. Lord knows that things ain't always easy." For a minute there was a faraway look in her eyes, but then her face turned into a big smile. "You're just like your father, boy. That man never would give up on anything he really wanted.
90 Did I ever tell you the time he was trying to learn to play the trombone?"

"No." Clyde still had tears in his eyes but he was smiling, too. Suddenly everybody was happy. It was like seeing a rainbow when it was still raining.

REREAD

Why do you think everyone reacts this way?

"Well, we were living over across from St. Nicholas Park in this little rooming house. Your father was working on a job down on Varick Street that made transformers or some such nonsense—anyway, he
100 comes home one day with this long package all wrapped up in brown paper. He walks in and sits it in the corner and doesn't say boo about what's in the bag. So at first I don't say anything either, and then I finally asks him what he's got in the bag, and he says, 'What bag?' Now this thing is about four feet long if it's an inch and he's asking *what* bag." Mrs. Jones wiped the crumbs from Gloria's end of the table with a quick swipe of the dish cloth, leaving a swirling pattern of tiny bubbles. Gloria tore off a paper towel
110 and wiped the area dry.

"Now I look over at him and he's trying to be **nonchalant**. Sitting there, a grown man, and big as he wants to be and looking for all the world like somebody's misplaced son. So I says, 'The bag in the corner.' And

nonchalant
(nŏn' shə länt')
not seeming to care

he says, 'Oh, that's a trombone I'm taking back to the pawn shop tomorrow.' Well, I naturally ask him what he's doing with it in the first place, and he says he got carried away and bought it but he realized that we
120 really didn't have the thirty-five dollars to spend on foolishness and so he'd take it back the next day. And all the time he's sitting there scratching his chin and rubbing his nose and trying to peek over at me to see how I felt about it. I just told him that I guess he knew what was best. Only the next day he forgot to take it back, and the next day he forgot to take it back, and finally I broke down and told him why didn't he keep it. He said he would if I thought he should.

130 "So he unwraps this thing and he was just as happy with it as he could be until he tried to get a tune out of it. He couldn't get a sound out of it at first, but then he started oomping and woomping with the thing as best he could. He worked at it and worked at it and you could see he was getting disgusted. I think he was just about to give it up when the lady who lived under us came upstairs and started complaining about the noise. It kept her Napoleon awake, she said. Napoleon was a dog.
140 Little ugly thing, too. She said your father couldn't play, anyway.

disgusted
(dʻs gʻs' tʻd)
adj. irritated and
impatient

"Well, what did she say that for? That man played that thing day and night. He worked so hard at that thing that his lips were too sore for him to talk right sometime. But he got the hang of it."

"I never remembered Pop playing a trombone," said Clyde.

"Well, your father had a streak in him that made him stick to a thing," she said, pouring some rice into

150 a colander to wash it off, “but every year his goals got bigger and bigger and he had to put some things down so that he could get to others. That old trombone is still around here some place. Probably in one of them boxes under Kitty’s bed. Now, you children, excuse me, young ladies and gentlemen, get on out of here and let me finish supper.”

THINK IT THROUGH

Why do you think Mrs. Jones shares this memory about Clyde’s father?

FOCUS

Discover how Clyde reacts to what his mom has shared.

We all went into Clyde's living room.

"That was my mom's good-doing speech," Clyde said. "She gets into talking about what a great guy
160 my father was and how I was like him and whatnot."

"You supposed to be like your father," Sam said.

"He was the one that raised you, right?"

"She wants me to be like him, and I want to be like him, too, I guess. She wants me to keep on trying with the academic thing."

"What do you want to do," Sam asked, "give it up?"

"No. Not really. I guess I want people like my mother to keep on telling me that I ought to do it, really. Especially when somebody tells me I can't do it."

170 "Boy," Sam said, sticking his thumbs in his belt and leaning back in the big stuffed chair, "you are just like your father."

Then we all went into Clyde's room and just sat around and talked for a while. Mostly about school and stuff like that, and I wanted to tell Clyde that I thought I could help him if he wanted me to. I was really getting good grades in school, but I thought that Clyde might get annoyed if I mentioned it.

But then Gloria said that we could study
180 together sometime and that was cool too.

annoyed

(ə nɔɪd')

adj. bothered

THINK IT THROUGH

1. From Clyde's viewpoint, why does his mother share the memory about his father?
2. Mrs. Jones might have reacted differently to Clyde's report card. Why do you think she reacts as she does?
3. How does Clyde feel about his mom's desire that he keep on trying?